Seabed 2030: Mapping of Seafloor

The **U.N.-backed project, called Seabed 2030**, is working to pool data to create a map of the **entire ocean floor by 2030**. The map will be freely available to all.

- The project was **launched in 2017** is a collaboration between the Nippon Foundation (Japanese philanthropic organisation) and Gebco (non-profit association of experts).
- So far, the biggest data contributors to Seabed 2030 have been Dutch energy prospector Fugro and deep-sea mapping firm Ocean Infinity which were also involved in the search for Malaysia Airlines jet MH370, which disappeared in 2014.
- The advanced **sonar technology** and advent of new technology such as **underwater drones and robots** is also speeding up the mapping process.

Benefits

- **Economic:** More than 90% of the world's trade is carried by sea, making safe navigation a key motivator for mapping.
    - It will **help the "blue economy",** as countries and companies seek to protect or exploit deep-sea resources - from exploring for oil and gas to installing wind farms or laying fibre-optic cables for the Internet.
- **Environmental:** it would provide a **better idea of sea levels as ice melts** and warn about **impending tsunamis** that could devastate coastal communities.

Challenges

- Even after collaboration at a scientific and technical level to share data, countries may use that knowledge **against one another in geopolitical spats.**
- Few countries are **reluctant to give up strategic proprietary data to the Seabed 2030 project**, largely due to national security concerns or in areas with sensitive geopolitical tensions, such as the South China Sea.

Conclusion

- The project gains importance in the **context of negotiations over UN Sustainable Development Goal (Goal 14 - to conserve and sustainably use the oceans)** due to be completed by 2020.
- Moreover, the next phase of the project will also **encourage data donors and crowdsourcing** - not just from exploration vessels, but also from cargo ships, recreational sea-users and fishing boats.